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ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL KMDR KPAL KWBG KPAO IS
SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (12/16): "EXTENDING ANNAPOLIS TO
CUT A PATH FOR THE ISRAELI RIGHTWING"

Main Stories:

All papers lead with photos and reporting on the release of 224 Palestinian prisoners from Israeli prisons on December 15 in an Israeli gesture of goodwill towards Palestinian Authority President Abbas. Abbas received the prisoners at the presidential complex in Ramallah stating that he would continue work to gain the release of all 11,000 Palestinians still in Israeli prisons. Al Hayat Al Jadida's and Al Ayyam's front pages report that "Palestinian Legislative Council Speaker" Aziz Dwayk of Hamas, currently detained in Israel with other Hamas "legislators", will soon appear before an Israeli court to learn the ruling on his continued imprisonment. The papers also report that a former Hamas minister Omar Abdul Raziq, who was released by Israel last August, turned himself in to the Israeli military on December 15 after Israel ordered him to serve a second term in Israeli prison.

The second lead story in all papers highlights statements by Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Fayyad and British Prime Minister Brown made on December 15 in London at a conference on investment in the Palestinian Territories. Fayyad is quoted urging the E.U. to take measures against Israeli settlement expansion, while Brown is quoted urging president-elect Obama to give Middle East issues priority, and halt Israeli settlement activities. All the papers front page references to a letter sent by Brown to Fayyad on December 15, reiterating the E.U. stand on opposing Israeli settlement activities and supporting the two-state solution.

Al Hayat Al Jadida's front page cites Reuters in reporting on a December 15 joint statement by Middle East Quartet Representative Tony Blair and the World Bank, calling on Israel to ease the cash flow crisis in Gaza by facilitating the transfer of cash to Gaza banks.

Al Ayyam's front page quotes PLO Executive Committee Member Yasir Abd Rabbuh predicting that Palestinian legislative and presidential

elections, based on a fully proportional system, will be held in the first half of 2009 in the West Bank and Gaza. Abd Rabbuh was responding to a recent speech made by Hamas leader Haniyah rejecting any extension to Palestinian Authority President Abbas' term, the paper notes.

Al Ayyam's front page cites AFP when quoting Amos Gilad, advisor to the Israeli Defense Minister, stating that the date when the truce with Hamas expires is unclear. Gilad's statement was made on December 15 in Cairo, where he also denied that the purpose of his visit was to urge Egypt to mediate with Hamas to secure an extension of the truce. The paper cites DPA in quoting a Hamas-affiliated Al Qassam Brigades source announcing that the final decision on extending the truce will be made in the next few days.

Al Quds' front page cites AFP in reporting on rallies held in Iraq to push for the release of the Iraqi journalist who attacked President Bush in Baghdad. The paper reports "wide-spread support" for the journalist who "insulted" the President who is "unpopular" in the Arab world. The paper quotes President Bush saying that he did not feel insulted, and cites the Washington Post describing the incident as the "goodbye kiss" that Bush deserved from the Iraqis. Al Quds runs a full inside page feature dedicated to Arab reactions to the shoe-throwing incident.

Al Hayat Al Jadida's front page cites news agencies in reporting on Israel's decision to deny entry to U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Richard Falk who, according to coverage, has angered Israel in the past with statements comparing the Israeli military to Nazi Germany's military. In related news, the paper's front page reports separately on death threats made against the U.N. General Assembly Speaker and the head of the Nicaraguan delegation to the U.N., the

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latter of whom is known for being critical of Israel's behavior, the paper notes.

Al Hayat Al Jadida runs an inside report on a visit by a delegation from the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem to Jenin. The delegation met with the Jenin Governor at the Chamber of Commerce to discuss the situation in the Governorate, including projects for an industrial zone that would be operational by 2011, and a new sewer system.

Al Ayyam's inside page reports on the Israeli military "storming" Balata refugee camp near Nablus on December 15, where they arrested four Palestinian youths. The paper adds that the Israeli military also "stormed" the Zawata village near Nablus, entering Palestinian homes and detaining Palestinians outside their houses.

BLOCK QUOTES:

1) Al Quds' editorial is titled, "Ending the rights of the Human Rights Rapporteur" (12/16): "We appreciate Professor Falk's stand and bravery in reporting on whatever he deems as true and necessary. We believe that he has now personally experienced some of the same practices that we do, when he was detained at the [Ben Gurion] airport and denied entry. [His experience at the airport]... is the most effective report that he could write..."

2) Hani Al Masry opines in Al Ayyam under the title "Extending the Annapolis track to cut a path for the Israeli rightwing" (12/16): "The end of 2008 and the new U.S. administration... constitute a historic chance for Palestinians to demand the articulation of a new political track that is serious and capable of ending the [Israeli] occupation and realizing a minimal level of respect for Palestinian rights... instead of clinging to the Annapolis track that has dramatically failed and needs to be buried, not revived."

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